



Rochester City School District
131 West Broad Street
Rochester, New York 14614
www.rcsdk12.org

February 1, 2018

Dear Families and Students of Rochester City Schools,

Our District and its community of educators will observe **Friday, February 16, as Black Lives Matter at School: A Day of Understanding & Affirmation**. The Rochester Board of Education, Rochester Teachers Association and Association of Supervisors and Administrators of Rochester recently passed resolutions to proclaim this day. The resolutions state that schools “should be places for the practice of equity, for the building of understanding, and for the active engagement of all in creating pathways to freedom and justice for all people.”

This day was created to affirm the lives of black children, who represent the majority of students we serve, and to promote understanding that will strengthen our community. Racial equity will not happen unless people are willing to talk about race, and this day is one important step in that process. The questions below provide some basic information about Black Lives Matter at School Day, and we will collaborate with community partners to provide additional resources and help spread the word.

How did this day come to be in Rochester? Is it part of the national Black Lives Matter movement?

Black Lives Matter at School is not an official part of the Black Lives Matter movement. Here, it began with a small group of parents, teachers and community members who shared a vision that diverse community partners could create “a day of education, dialog and action that will actively engage a significant number of educational communities throughout Monroe County in activities which support understanding and affirmation of Black Lives.” This day is meant as the beginning of ongoing dialog, education and action. The Board of Education and bargaining units that represent teachers and administrators have formally supported this vision.

What will happen on February 16, 2018?

The Board resolution calls on the District to “explore and grapple with the past, present and future status of Black lives in our society and to affirm that status as equal to, and not secondary to, the lives of others.” Educators have choices about how to participate. Teachers may design lessons or facilitate conversations among students and colleagues about race, which could include the Black Lives Matter movement. They could invite local activists and experts in as guest speakers or wear T-shirts and stickers that make their support visible. Student leaders should be encouraged to be involved and share their experiences with their school communities. We encourage District staff to use the resources that are being provided as starting points. The most important thing we can do is to use the relationships we have with students to share powerful, thoughtful, engaging and respectful dialog in classrooms across the city.

Don't all lives matter?

Of course all lives matter. However, 57% of our students are black, and by almost every measure, people of color are not treated equally by our society. It is especially important to highlight the value of black lives in a society whose history involves centuries of slavery and denial of civil rights to black citizens, the impacts of which continue to this day. Affirming one thing as valuable and deserving of attention does not automatically devalue another, just as when a parent says they love one child, they are not offending or excluding their other children. Similarly, saying that black lives matter does not mean that brown, white or "blue" (police) lives don't matter. It simply means that black lives deserve special affirmation, understanding and attention in our District and the rest of society right now.

Isn't this too "political" for schools?

This is intended as a day of affirmation, respectful conversation and raising awareness. Our students, staff, families and schools all exist in society, and events in society deserve our attention in schools. Our District is charged with preparing students to be leaders and good citizens. We support these goals in teaching them to develop relationships across difference, recognize unfair treatment, examine bias and advocate for justice supports those goals. Schools should be places where students and staff know and care about each other enough to have honest conversations about difficult subjects such as race, power and personal stories.

How can I get involved?

We encourage you to learn more and discuss Black Lives Matter at School with your child, and to contact your child's teacher or Principal to find out how you can support your school's efforts. If you are interested in purchasing a t-shirt for yourself or your child, you can do so and find more information about Black Lives Matter at School at this local website:

<http://blacklivesmatteratschool.org/>. (Please note that this is a grassroots organizing group which will update the website as the day approaches.) You will also find information on the District's [website](#).

Students should know that our District understands inequities based on race, affirms that the lives of people of color matter, and believes that we all have a responsibility to work for equity. Thank you for partnering with us in this work to improve our schools and the Rochester community.

Sincerely,



Barbara Deane-Williams
Superintendent
Rochester City Schools



Tim Cliby
President



Adam Urbanski
President
Rochester Teachers Association



Angelina Rivera
President

Association of Supervisors &
Administrators of Rochester

Rochester Association of
Paraprofessionals